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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHENGDU 000035

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI CH

SUBJECT: SW CHINA: MINORITIES DISCUSS PRC MINORITY POLICY

REF: A) 09 CHENGDU 31; B) FBS20100106816009; C) CHENGDU 14; D) 09 CHENGDU 315;  
E)FBS20100203453231; F) 08 CHENGDU 55; G)08 CHENGDU 188

CHENGDU 00000035 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: David E. Brown, Consul General, U.S. Consulate  
General Chengdu, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Retired Tibetan Communist leader Yangling Dorje and three ethnic minority professors at Chengdu's Southwest Nationalities University -- a Miao, a Korean, and a Tibetan -- recently discussed their frustrations with PRC minority policy in two separate meetings with Congen Chengdu. An ethnic Miao anthropologist said that the 56 nationalities of China were defined based on both PRC politics and ethnic research; the dominant Han ethnic group is a modern nationalist 19th century creation. An ethnic Korean professor deplored the depiction of support to minority areas as assistance -- the PRC is sixty years old and heretofore most money has been invested in Han areas. Prominent retired Tibetan official Yangling Dorje discussed with Consul General serious problems in the implementation of Communist Party policies in Tibetan areas of China. Some officials who are not patriotic or are mostly concerned with their own interests are too quick to suppress honest criticisms and so make ethnic relations much worse, he said. Comparing the perspectives of Chinese minorities helps put into focus two problems that they share: Han ethnic chauvinism and the arbitrary exercise of official power. End Summary.

Three Professors Discuss PRC Minorities Policy

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¶2. (SBU) Three ethnic minority professors (two of them vice deans) from Chengdu's Southwest Minorities University, a Miao (Hmong,) a Korean, and a Tibetan, critiqued Chinese minorities policy in a discussion with a Chinese businessman and Congenoff at a Chengdu restaurant. The professors explained that their university is directly under the Department of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, unlike the Western Nationalities University near Xi'an, which is under the government of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. (Note: The Chinese term "minzu" can be translated as nationality or ethnicity. However, since the definition of minzu in China depends on an uncertain mix of politics and ethnic backgrounds, some foreign scholars prefer to simply transliterate the Chinese term. The number of minzu is set at the arbitrary number of 56. Some scholars say this divides some groups and clumps together others. For example, the 12 distinct native peoples of Taiwan, who are collectively deemed to be the Taiwan Mountain People minzu. End Note.)

¶13. (SBU) The three professors found much common ground, seeing -- over the 60 years of the PRC -- Han chauvinism, systemic neglect of minority issues, and much greater public investment in majority Han areas than in the minority areas that constitute more than half of the country's territory. The professors noted that many people have difficulty distinguishing China from the dominant Han ethnicity; this was particularly true during the rule of President Jiang Zemin, who promoted the idea of a common all-encompassing Zhonghua minzu -- "China ethnic group."

¶14. (C) The Korean professor said that the trumpeting of aid to minority areas is all wrong -- it is only right to invest in these areas, it shouldn't be made out to be a gift to minority people. He wondered what could be the relationship of minorities to the government when they send "troops to occupy our areas." The most outspoken of the three, he noted a great change in the mentalities of students they have seen, with students born in the 1990s being quite different from those born in the 1980s. [Note: Chinese often comment on the 80's generation and the 90's generation and how these generations both differ in being more assertive and thinking more independently than people born during the extreme repression of pre-1978 China. End note] He hopes that this mentality change in the general population will carry over into the Chinese leadership as new generations rise to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The Korean professor hoped that one day China could be a federation of highly autonomous provinces, each "like Hong Kong."

¶15. (SBU) The Miao professor, who is both an anthropology professor and vice dean, noted that the "Han" ethnicity is a recent conception that arose in the late 19th century to rally opposition to the Manchu led Qing Dynasty. He recommended an article by a Taiwan academic at Taipei's Academica Sinica on this subject. (Note: The Miao professor told Congenoff on another occasion that he was frustrated by cultural erosion

CHENGDU 00000035 002.2 OF 003

caused by the control of Miao culture by outsiders, specifically by changes in the nature and timing of traditional festivals for the sake of tourism development. See Ref A. End Note.)

#### Group Rights vs. Individual Rights

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¶16. (SBU) The three academics asked Congenoff to discuss U.S. minorities policy. Congenoff discussed the Civil Rights movement in which groups of people struggled to realize their individual rights, as well as the special legal status of American Indians, which involved group rights based on unextinguished tribal sovereignty and treaties between Indian tribes and the USG. The academics were intrigued with the two different approaches to minority rights -- individual-rights based and group-rights based. They speculated that an individual-rights-based approach might be more successful than the current group-rights-based system in protecting the legal rights of minority people in China today.

Sichuan Tibetologists Criticize PRC Nationalities Policy

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¶7. (U) Yangling Dorje, an ethnic Tibetan who had been vice governor of both the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Sichuan Province, was among many academics who severely criticized government policy at a December 19, 2009 meeting of the Sichuan Tibetology Research Society (Ref B). Dorje argued that the government policy of separating politics and religion from education and health care (enshrined in a slogan called the "Three Separations") is seriously mistaken and unworkable. Monks and nuns are citizens of China and they have political rights, he said. Telling them to stay out of politics is to say that it is wrong for them to exercise their political rights. Monasteries have historically been the centers of Tibetan education and health care: to try to keep them out of these areas is to completely misunderstand Tibetan culture, he argued.

¶8. (U) Dorje added that all monasteries should not be condemned because some monks support separatism, any more than a Chinese city should shut down the entire transportation department because a certain official takes bribes.

Dorje: Proper Implementation is the Key

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¶9. (SBU) In a meeting with Consul General (septel) on February 3, Dorje said that while the Communist Party has a wise general policy, but the details and the implementation are sometimes poor. He said that well meaning disagreements with officials should be resolved in a friendly and cooperative manner while enemies of the people are to be suppressed under China's system of the people's democratic dictatorship. While Hu Jintao is well meaning, some of the people under him are affected by their personal or group interests. Some are not patriotic enough or do not think enough about the interests of all the people. He mentioned that the local government in Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan had closed down a school run by a monastery to the great unhappiness of local people under the "Three Separates" policy (which includes separation of religion from education and medical care). Dorje said he had intervened with the Sichuan Province Communist Party Committee, and the school was eventually re-opened.

¶10. (SBU) The Fifth Working Conference convened by China's top leaders in January called for a greater stress on improving living conditions of Tibetans and reducing the gaps in investment between the different Tibetan areas. Dorje said implementation of the conclusions of the Fifth Working Conference will be key. If the guidelines of the recent three-day Fifth Working Conference on Tibet were implemented,

CHENGDU 00000035 003.2 OF 003

this would be the most important event for Tibetans since the month-long Second Working Conference on Tibet convened by Hu Yaobang in the mid-1980s, he felt. Dorje added that the Tibet Working Conference focused on the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), not Tibetan areas of China generally. (Note: The TAR is referred to as "Xizang" in Chinese, often translated in PRC publications as simply Tibet, while another word, "Zangqu" refers to all ethnic Tibetan areas of China. End Note.) While the Tibet Working Conference continued to focus on the TAR, the issue of other Tibetan areas came up because the gap in development between the TAR and the other Tibetan areas has become too large. 80 years old and retired, Dorje did not attend the conference, but has many contacts who did. (Note: Refs B and C contain similar critiques of PRC Tibetan policy by an ethnic Tibetan academic, which appeared as conference notes on a Chinese language Tibetan culture website in Gansu Province.

End Note.)

PRC Press Carries Yangling Dorje's Praise for Party Policy

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¶11. (SBU) In January an article appeared in the PRC press in which Yangling Dorje is quoted as giving high praise to PRC policy in minority areas. (Comment: Apparently another serious misrepresentation by the TAR Party propaganda department, which also made a false report on Chengdu CG's visit with the TAR Vice Governor in October 2009. See ref D. End Comment.)

Comment: PRC Minorities Share Many Dissatisfactions

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¶12. (C) The discussion with the professors illustrates the point that PRC minorities have many of the same grievances. For example, compare what well-known Uighur professor Ilham Tohti of the Central Minorities University in Beijing says about Uighur grievances and the complaints of other minorities. Uighur grievances are at bottom much like those of Tibetans. What Tibetan intellectuals discuss is very similar to Ilham Tohti's discussion of Uighur complaints: problems of the Tibetan areas of China: language, education, getting respect from the dominant ethnic Han, and getting a decent job in competition with migrants from the outside (Ref E). They are all there.

¶13. (C) Racism is the elephant in the room. In China, the group marker isn't color, but rather ethnic identity and culture, and it is much easier to "pass" as a member of the dominant group in China than in a country where color is the group marker. Nonetheless, the assertions of inferiority and superiority based on these group markers are also strong. Although Mao Zedong in his writings sometimes decried Han chauvinism, very few non-minority Chinese today see this systemic problem. Instead, they blame minority dissatisfactions and protests on the evil plots of "outside agitators" who are disturbing otherwise happy and content minority peoples. Academics at the Sichuan Tibetology Conference made brave critiques of the problems that PRC policy and Han attitudes towards minorities are creating. Preferring to ignore how policy failures have frustrated minority people, Chinese officials don't like to hear Mao Zedong's dictum "A single spark can light a prairie fire" in this context as an explanation for outbursts of anger by Tibetans and other minorities(Ref F and G).

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